Nightmare on the Street

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Nightmare on the Street

Rachael Rochocki

One the steps of the Vietnam War Memorial
In magical, beautiful, downtown Chicago
Lays a sleeping man who drains the magic and beauty
out of everything
His skin is dark as night, a thick layer of grime
covering his flesh, bruising his face
His clothes are shabby and torn,
dark colors of midnight black, forest green
Multiple layers, though the air is hot
His shoes are without laces,
frayed at the tongue
His head rests against a dirty purple backpack,
hair smudged with grease
He is curled up in the fetal position,
protecting himself
from the harsh world that is his reality,
the same reality of his parents, and their parents
A reality he thought he would escape
He would do better
but he couldn’t
His eyelids flutter and
he twists his body in a dream
A small, youthful girl with long red hair and blue eyes
who smells of vanilla and her father’s riches
skips by without a second glance
An old woman carries a large bag and an umbrella
and she walks, without stopping
A freckled, gangly teenager,
who has yet to grow out of her awkward phase
treads through the memorial site, looking at her feet
She sees the sleeping man
through the hair falling in front of her eyes
She walks along the black marble wall
As she passes him,
she tucks several bills between his arm and chest
The man jerks in his sleep, a quick reaction to an intrusion
But his eyes peel open too late
The teenage girl is gone
Noticing the money, six dollars total, he tucks it in his bag
eyeing the other homeless men with greedy suspicion
until he is certain no one notices his new fortune
He sleeps again
A soiled soul in a magical, beautiful place